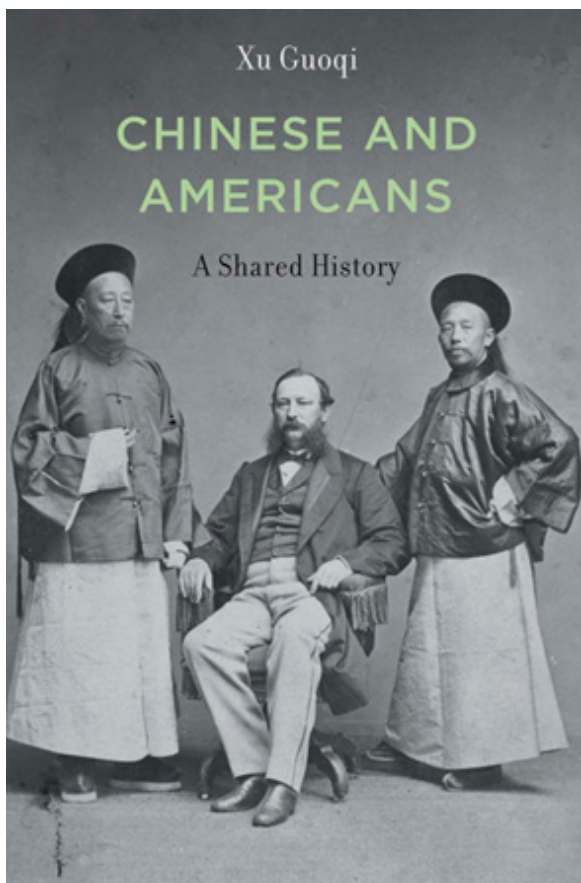


**Xu Guoqi. Chinese and Americans: A Shared History.**  
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The book, *Chinese and Americans: A Shared History*, presents recounts of vivid cross-cultural exchanges between Chinese and Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at a more individual level, and intends to reveal a transnational history jointly shaped by people on the two sides of the Pacific. This history, as the book shows, becomes their “shared traditions,” which could foster a positive future of Sino-American relations (Xu 2014, 21).

The study is predicated on the theoretical framework of Akira Iriye’s “cultural internationalism,” which refers to “efforts that attempt to build and foster cultural understanding, cooperation, and a sense of shared values across national borders” (Xu 2014, 3). The book emphasizes the importance of common values and mutual understanding in Sino-American relations. Chapter 1 features the efforts of Anson Burlingame (蒲安臣, 1820-1870) in securing a “cooperative policy” between treaty powers and the Qing government to allow for China’s restoration and development in the mid-nineteenth century. Burlingame not only assisted in the dissolution of the Lay-Osborne flotilla and helped settle the dispute between Britain and China, but also served in a leading role on the first Chinese diplomatic mission to America and Europe. Chapter 2 concentrates on the Chinese Education Mission (1872-1881, hereafter referred to as CEM), which was China’s first proactive official scheme to arrange Chinese youths to learn from the West through studying in the United States, as doors were opened owing to the Burlingame Treaty. The Chinese students’ performance and achievements reduced Americans’ prejudice against China and contributed to China’s modernization and diplomatic strengths. Chapter 3 tells the story of Ge Kunhua (戈鲲化, 1838-1882), the first Chinese language teacher at Harvard University who educated American students in Chinese language, poetry and culture and made early contributions to the collection of books in the Harvard-Yenching Library. His success and active involvement in local communities testifies to the friendship between Chinese and Americans when an anti-Chinese sentiment was brewing and spreading in the United States around the 1880s. Chapter 4 introduces Frank Goodnow (1859-1939), also known as the “father of American administration” (Xu 2014, 140), and his advisory role in the making of China’s first constitution as well as Yuan Shikai’s (袁世凱, 1859-1916) restoration of monarchy. The chapter explicates Goodnow’s belief of China’s lack of foundation and

readiness for instituting a parliamentary government, informs readers of “Yuan’s conviction that a strong center was required for modernization, national strengthening, and maintaining order” (Xu 2014, 190) in China’s circumstances with foreign aggression, but questions China’s sustenance of authoritarian domestic governance. Chapter 5 focuses on the American educator, John Dewey (1859-1952), who came to lecture in China when the New Culture Movement was in progress and the Chinese wanted to create a new national identity of science and democracy after World War I. The chapter features Dewey’s sympathy with China’s pursuit for territorial integrity and equality in diplomatic relations in the May Fourth Movement, his endeavors in promoting mutual understanding between Chinese and Americans through lectures and articles, and the revival of his pragmatism in China’s reforms in the late 1970s. Chapter 6 turns to international sports games, the Olympics, narrating China’s Ping-Pong Diplomacy in the early 1970s and discussing the Sino-American cooperation in the tensions of the cold war underlying the sports games. The concluding chapter reemphasizes the shared history and interests between China and the United States. It expresses disapproval of America’s “engagement-and-containment” approach for treating Sino-American relations in the face of China’s rise. Instead, it claims, “Embracing a willingness to emphasize shared interests and a shared journey might be a better and wiser choice for both countries . . . . since in many ways they are in the same boat and their fates remain interconnected” (Xu 2014, 263-264).

This book has prominent strengths that have enhanced its value. Primarily, as informed in the introductory chapter, the book explores history of nations from an interconnected and cross-boundary perspective and illuminates the dynamic international interactions between Chinese and Americans in the formation of each other’s national history. This awareness of “otherness” in historiography is conducive to the perception of cultural fusion and external contributions in a nation’s achievements. It promotes a sense of humbleness, which makes room for constructive communication and mutual understanding.

Secondly, the book adopts a bottom-up and more microscopic approach for exploring transnational history. Unlike conventional narratives that give weight to “the roles of government, politicians, and the economy,” this book zooms in on individuals who were “active in shaping

and pushing their ideas to work toward a better mutual understanding and better bilateral relations” (Xu 2014, 2). This approach may prevent overlooking individuals’ voices, experiences and contributions in history, complement mainstream historical accounts, and draw historiography closer to past social reality.

Moreover, in terms of writing style, this book transitions from chapter 1 to chapter 5 smoothly by drawing connections among the figures under discussion. Anson Burlingame’s efforts on China’s treaty with the United States laid the foundation for the CEM. Like the CEM students, Ge Kunhua strengthened friendship between Chinese and Americans in a period with tense Sino-American relations, and Ge also taught Ding Chongji (丁崇吉, 1860-1942), one of the CEM students, at Harvard. Charles Williams Eliot, as Harvard’s new president in 1869, had met Anson Burlingame who was then a Chinese envoy, appointed Ge Kunhua as the first Chinese language teacher at Harvard, and urged the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to find a professor to assist China to draft its Republican constitution, for which Frank Goodnow was finally appointed. Similar to Goodnow who believed Young China was lacking in democratic citizens, John Dewey was more proactive in lecturing in China on the meaning of democracy and the relationship between democracy and education. Arranging the chapters this way allows readers to visualize interpersonal connections that drive history forward and reinforces the textual cohesion of the book as well.

On the other hand, some limitations of the book need to be considered as well. First of all, chapter 1 of the book considers the Burlingame Treaty in 1868 “the first equal treaty between the two countries” (Xu 2014, 58). However, Zhao (2020, 256) contends that some stipulations of the treaty only appear to be reciprocal but “ultimately serve the interests of the United States”. Chapter 1 also affirms, “American interests were still paramount” (Xu 2014, 35). As Zhao further explains, the provision of the Burlingame Treaty on education was not for meeting the demands of the Qing government, which did not express much zeal in sending students overseas in the mid-nineteenth century. Instead, the provision was “intended to materialize the plan for building an interpreter-training school to fill American consulates with qualified interpreters and consuls in China” (Zhao 2020, 260). Also, Zhao explains that the Treaty fulfilled

the need of the United States for labor force in the 1860s for constructing its transcontinental railway. Burlingame's contributions to China's diplomacy deserve recognition, yet it is worth noting that the Treaty may not be as equal as it seems.

In addition, chapter 6 of the book seems to endorse that the Chinese becoming the "sick man of East Asia" in the late Qing period was mainly owing to China's loss of its "fighting spirit" (Xu 2014, 235-237). Nevertheless, one principal reason for the Chinese's increasing weakness in modern Chinese history is the opium trade that had sickened the country until the twentieth century when Tang Guo'an (唐國安, 1858-1913, one of the CEM students) spoke for China at the first International Opium Commission held in Shanghai in 1909 for terminating the trade (Hamrin n.d.; Ziyuan Association 2013) and when the State Council of the Central People's Government of China issued a decree strictly to prohibit opium and other drugs, on February 24, 1950 (People's Government of Guangdong Province n.d.). The book mentions the opium trade or wars that resulted from it in other chapters but somehow overlooks it in chapter 6.

Furthermore, as a case of less official contact between Chinese and Americans, the story of Edgar Snow (1905-1972) is likewise noteworthy in history. Snow is perhaps the first journalist from America to be a close observer of the Long March in China and wrote first-hand reports of it. As an icon of his friendship with China, a tomb with part of his remains is situated in the campus of Peking University. Chapter 6 of the book briefly mentions that Mao Zedong (毛澤東, 1893-1976) had told Snow "his expectation that the Chinese and American people could be friends" (Xu 2014, 242), but it does not render much detailed narration regarding Snow.

On the whole, while these limitations merit readers' attention, the book still presents notable cases of shared history co-constructed by Chinese and Americans. The two peoples have developed a tradition of friendship and accumulated a rich experience of cooperation over time despite that they display a different pattern for their respective development. Seeking common ground while managing differences would still be their path forward. Readers who are willing to explore the topic of the book further may also be interested in the book, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*:

The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, which gives a clear voice and image to numerous silent Chinese laborers who risked their lives behind the curtains and made massive contributions to the construction of America's transcontinental railway and ensuing national economic development. Additionally, readers may look into the story of Claire Lee Chennault (1890-1958). Chennault helped train the Chinese air force and supported China's self-defense in World War II by leading the American Volunteer Group (also known as the Flying Tigers) that he assisted in forming in 1941. For details, see Chennault's memoir, *Way of a Fighter*. Future research on the topic of the book may align with the microscopic approach and survey more stories of ordinary people and illustrate how they have cultivated and maintained friendship amidst the ebb and flow of the times.

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